



Engaging Spirituality

Live deeply. Love broadly.

Co-Facilitator Manual



JustFaith Ministries

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PART ONE

Welcome and Getting Started

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 2 Corinthians 3:17

Welcome to Engaging Spirituality, a small-group experiment in loosening our lives, getting free to live graciously and compassionately in these times.

At every stage, Engaging Spirituality should feel spacious, open-ended and saturated with that weighty PRESENCE which pervades God's universe.

Let the Spirit Loose in our Lives

When we engage Gospel spirituality we should not expect peace and quiet, but brace ourselves for peace with justice.

The Pentecost event describes a Spirit which is neither placid nor passive. It promises instead the stirring and rousing of wind and fire, a disturbing, liberating presence capable of shaking things up and moving us out.

All our experience with developing or deepening small faith communities indicates that struggle, frustration and communication difficulties are a *necessary* part of the process. Indeed your greatest challenge as a group may involve staying open, mindful and trusting of that spirit-force, present and active amid the tension, stresses and growing pains of your shared, spiritual journey.

Take your time as you review this working document.
Print it out and make use of the spaces to add your own thoughts and notes.

To make the task of coordination easier we suggest that you collate this and all subsequent Engaging Spirituality documents in a ring binder for easy reference.

If possible, get together with the person who will be co-facilitating with you so that you can pray, review and discuss this manual together.

If questions or concerns arise in the review of this document or the implementation of the process contact us at spirituality@justfaith.org.

Thank you for taking this step into Engaging Spirituality and count our prayerful support,

The Staff at JustFaith Ministries.



Opening a Space for Prayer

Every journey involves preparation, gathering resources, and focusing energy. Before reading any further, take a moment to enter into a receptive mode, open to the guidance of the liberating and loosening Spirit of Jesus. Let this ritual prepare you for the tasks ahead.



You will need a candle and a bible.

Wait for our God; be strong, and let your hearts take courage; Wait for our God! Psalm 27:14

- Light a candle and enter into silence. As you become aware of the rhythm of your breathing, allow yourself to become attuned to the pervasive presence of the Holy Spirit.
- Open the bible at 1 Corinthians 12. Slowly read out verses 4 to 7.
- Return to silence. Allow any misgivings, concerns, or anxieties you might have about Engaging Spirituality (*the work and time involved, your gifts and limitations, and the people you have invited into the process*) to surface.
- If you are praying alone, silently attend to each concern with the ancient prayer, *“Veni Sancte Spiritus,”* or *“Come Holy Spirit.”*
- If your companion has joined you, alternate naming your concerns aloud and praying the response together.
- Intentionally hand over all these concerns to the competent care of God and, for the time being, let them go.
- Conclude the brief ritual by praying this passage from the Gospel of John.

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom GOD will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

John 14:26-27



Connecting with JustFaith Ministries

Co-facilitators retrieve Engaging Spirituality materials from the JustFaith website. After a group registers, we email instructions and a link for accessing materials to the co-facilitators listed on the registration. Since Engaging Spirituality is divided into distinct stages, you will be able to download session outlines in logical sequence, organize the documents and save them to your system.

All session materials are formatted as (PDF) documents. Co-facilitators need to read the materials thoroughly, with special attention to the directions, supplies, and preparations for each session.

Do not hesitate to contact us directly: spirituality@justfaith.org or 502-429-0865.

Ordering Resources

The spiritual reading books, the prayer journal and the DVDs provide depth and breadth to the process of spiritual enrichment.

You will need to:

- Be attentive to additional supplies such as the covenant cloth, cross, candle, bible, and other symbols.
- Order the books and prayer journal for each participant.
- Order a copy of the DVDs.

You will receive one order form that lists the required resources in chronological sequence. The session outlines indicate when and where books or DVDs are used. With the exception of the Prayer Journal, you can purchase resources from a variety of sources. JustFaith Ministries (JFM) provides an opportunity for groups to secure all print and video materials from a single, low-cost source that guarantees rapid delivery.

Outlining the Process

Three Movements

Engaging Spirituality unfolds in three distinct movements:

- Out to the Light
- Into the Dark
- Down to Earth

Each movement involves seven sessions.

The four retreats (*Opening, Immersion, Pilgrimage and Commissioning*) serve as bridges, leading the group from one movement to the next.

Twenty-One Sessions

Each (2½ hour) session includes these components:

- Meditation
- Thematic presentation
- Prayerful Listening
- Dialogue



PART TWO

Elements of Engaging Spirituality

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.

Marcel Proust

Retreats

The four retreat components in the Engaging Spirituality process are pivotal, and each fulfills a unique purpose.

Spirituality defines a quality of presence— our **WAY** of being in the world— whether alone, in community or immersed in the busyness of life.

Prayerful reflection is integrated into every step along the way.

There are four key reflective moments built into Engaging Spirituality:

- **Opening Retreat** (over two days)
- **Immersion Day** (8-hour day)
- **Justice Pilgrimage** (8-hour day)
- **Commissioning Day** (6-hour day)

Combined, these retreats offer a multidimensional experience that includes invitation, immersion, integration, and commissioning into Gospel living.

Attempts to bypass or shorten them will seriously impact the quality of your group's experience.

Outreach

Following Jesus will draw us out into broken places, to touch and be touched by the wounds of this world, where life is threatened and God's people are alienated and vulnerable.

Each participant is responsible for organizing an on-going outreach experience that will demand (at least) two hours of personal presence per month.

The spiritual thrust of the Gospel is outgoing, compelling us to embrace life with compassion—to feed, to forgive, to heal. Jesus proclaimed a liberating spirituality that is good news for all God's children and in particular those who are poor and sorely afflicted.

Engaging Spirituality challenges everyone to practice "*active-contemplation*" by reaching out to "*be with*" God's people in need. Within the first month all participants identify and commit to personal outreach that invites them into relationship along one of the broken edges of life. People can decide to share in the same ministry with one or more of the group members.



Outreach (Cont'd)

Deepening our personal connection to the needs and gifts of our neighbors is an important dimension of discipleship. The relationships that develop at the outreach ministry as well as the lessons gleaned there, provide a context for the spiritual practices and content for reflection at every session.

This outreach component should be woven into the process at regular intervals (*once a week or every-other week*). Participants begin the discernment of potential ministry opportunities during the opening retreat.

Spiritual Reading

Engaging Spirituality encourages people to implement a regular pattern of spiritual reading into their lives.

Participants read a series of books together and these books serve as companions to the process. The texts have been specifically selected to complement the characteristics of a Gospel-based spirituality that is practical, unsophisticated and accessible, focused on discipleship, and directed toward the crises of our times.

The practice of spiritual reading as a form of prayer invites participants to:

- choose a sacred space (*a room, favorite chair or prayer place*)
- identify an optimal time of day
- light a candle
- maintain a moderated pace
- read and re-read with care
- pause to ponder ideas
- digest insights slowly
- make notes in a journal

Toward the end of Engaging Spirituality participants receive an annotated bibliography listing a number of options for on-going spiritual development.

Community

Gospel transformation happens through community. In our over-full lives, finding and forming a dedicated community of faithful friends is a great and rewarding challenge.

The members of your Engaging Spirituality group are encouraged to grow together from an interest group into a community of friends. During this intensive process, encourage informal gatherings where people can relax and deepen the bonds of community.



Prayer Journal

A spiral-bound journal that includes quotes, questions and practical challenges has been developed specifically for Engaging Spirituality. Starting with the opening retreat, participants spend time between sessions at prayer with their journals.

In addition to spiritual reading, participants also adopt the practice of keeping a prayer journal. The journal accompanies participants through the themes and movements of Engaging Spirituality. Co-facilitators remind everyone of their commitment to journal prayer, and invite them to share the fruits of their journals at the sessions.

Bearings Letters

At each session participants reflect on a personal letter from a contemporary “spiritual pathfinder.”

Commissioned specifically for Engaging Spirituality, these letters are called *BEARINGS* since the authors bear witness to their personal struggle to live an authentic life and help us find our bearings amid the complexities of today’s world. Contributors include contemplatives, teachers, writers, ministers and social activists. Bearings letters address three penetrating questions and are honest, personal, practical, and intimate in tone. As the process unfolds, participants compose and share their own Bearings letter with their group.

The last session of each month is dedicated to “*Prayerful Listening*.” Participants practice attentive and active listening as they share their personal “Bearings” letter.

Spiritual Practices

Throughout the process, participants are encouraged to implement changes in the patterns of their lives in order to embrace a “fuller life” in the spirit of the Gospel, and in the light of God’s people in need.

Engaging Spirituality focuses squarely on what it means and what it takes to follow Jesus with integrity today. Recognizing that the Gospel asks us to “*turn our lives around*,” this process challenges us to disarm our hearts and put down our agendas in order to welcome the possibilities of a life transformed.

The process identifies six life-attitudes or practices for authentic discipleship in these times. These disciplines invite us to apply a spirituality of Gospel-living into the rhythm of our days. Practices like *listening*, *centering*, *slowing* and *letting-go* are indications of a deep desire for a reorientation of our lives and a reminder that Gospel transformation begins with our everyday choices and daily life patterns. Guidelines on how to introduce and integrate these spiritual practices are included in the session outlines and prayer journal.



PART THREE

Facilitating the Process

Be Prepared to be Led

In order to limit additional planning meetings between sessions, the materials suggest a brief (10-minute) pre and post-session co-facilitator gathering.

Directions and supplies for each session are outlined in the materials.

Co-facilitators should be in touch before each session in order to:

- prepare themselves in prayer
- review the materials
- identify necessary symbols or supplies
- delegate tasks
- surrender to the flow of the process

The pre-session preparation involves a check-in, session overview and a moment of reflection. The post-session “afterglow” includes a moment of grateful quiet, an “examen” or prayerful review of the session, and a look ahead to the events or tasks of the coming week.

Suggestions for Framing the Sessions

In praying, do not babble like the unbelievers, who think they will be heard because of their many words.

Matthew 6: 7

Your primary task as co-facilitators involves opening and maintaining a reverential environment. Use these guidelines to open a prayerful listening space.

- Be prepared for each session. Arrive (10-15 minutes) ahead.
- Set up the space and set the tone with reflective music.
- Invoke the Spirit: pray together before everyone arrives.
- Welcome everyone warmly.
- Avoid rushing. Allow people the time they need to settle.
- Use the chime to invite people into attentive presence.
- Keep handouts and instructions to a minimum.
- Model prayerful focus and listening presence for the group.
- Keep the prayer space uncluttered.
- Extend gentle invitations, but *never* pressure anyone to share.
- If the sharing devolves into debate, strike the chime and call for a minute of silence.
- In moments of tension, or following heartfelt sharing, invoke the Spirit by praying:
“*Veni, Sancte Spiritus!*” (Come, Holy Spirit!).
- Be especially attentive to openings, closings and breaks.
- Be sensitive when inviting people to pray with their bodies (eye contact, joining hands, rituals inviting touch, a sign of peace...).
For some, this can be uncomfortable.
- If you choose to add more elaborate body prayer make sure the entire group is comfortable and agreeable.
- Encourage everyone to be faithful to their prayer practice, outreach ministry, journal-keeping and spiritual practices.



Do not be intimidated by silence,
even awkward silence is holy ground.

- Keep business announcements to a minimum and make sure prayer and the sharing of peace are the concluding elements of every gathering.
- Continually remind participants to surrender to the group process, especially where you encounter resistance.

Holy Listening

Engaging Spirituality Beyond Discussion

For good reason, our culture places a high value on free and open discussion. Engaging Spirituality sessions purposefully DO NOT provide a forum to talk about concepts, techniques or books. The session time together is dedicated entirely to contemplative, prayerful presence and the practice of holy listening. While this kind of intimate focus is difficult to maintain, the fruits of such efforts far outweigh the cultural challenges it presents. There are many venues in our lives for discussion. Dedicated time and space for “*focused listening*” and “*heart sharing*” is a rare, holy thing. At the outset, this lack of space for discursive conversation may be a source of frustration, for you as well as for participants. Encourage people to talk about the books, techniques and ideas between sessions and at social times, with friends and family, at work, community and church gatherings.

Listening for Wisdom

Reflect on the statements below, especially the ones that resonate or challenge you. Perhaps there are others you could add. You may want to copy these (*or similar axioms*) into your journal, share them at appropriate times in the ensuing weeks of reflection, or post them in your meeting space.

- *Whatever is shared from the heart deserves to be received with reverence.*
- *Every perspective is a perspective.*
- *We are each entrusted with some piece of truth.*
- *There is nothing holy about blaming or shaming.*
- *We are all responsible for our own feelings and what we do with them.*
- *Everyone has something to teach us, especially those we are tempted to dismiss.*
- *Ridicule and sarcasm are indications of a hard heart.*
- *People should not always hold the same opinions.*
- *The harsher the truth, the more closely we must listen.*
- *Whether “I like” or “I dislike” a statement has little to do with its inherent truth or value.*
- *Nothing is gained by refusing to apologize for inevitable missteps in communication.*
- *What we hear and see depends largely on what we are listening and looking for.*



Five Modes for Sacred Listening

Engaging Spirituality participants are invited into the communion of holy listening. The session materials identify one or two penetrating questions for heart sharing. In order to foster a reverential attitude toward listening, these moments of dialogue are formal and structured. This will be challenging for some.

Co-facilitators set the pace and tone of the sharing by:

- Inviting participants to pause before and after each individual sharing
- Leaving room for silence
- Reminding people NOT to interrupt, interject or contradict one another
- Encouraging those who are not speaking to practice wholehearted listening
- Challenging everyone to share and listen from the heart; beyond ideas or opinions

At various points, the materials will direct you to adopt one or more of these five modes for contemplative sharing:

Rule of Thumb

*The larger the group, the more need for structure.
The smaller the circle, the less need for formality.*

1 Large Group: Invitational Mode

"...I invite you to share what is in your heart..."

1. The whole group remains together in one large circle.
2. A co-facilitator initiates the dialogue by nominating an individual in the circle and inviting him/her to share from the heart.
3. After that person has shared, s/he nominates another person in the circle.
4. This process continues until everyone has spoken.
5. If the invitee is neither ready, nor inclined to share, s/he can decline and nominate another person.

Example

Co-Facilitator: *"I would like to invite Mary to share what is in her heart."*

Mary: *"Thank You. I would like to defer at this point, and invite John to share what is in his heart."*

6. When everyone has been nominated, extend another invitation to those who initially declined.
7. After everyone has had the opportunity to speak, invite the group to enter into silence for a few moments.
8. Re-open the sharing, inviting anyone who feels moved to offer an additional reflection.
9. This invitation is repeated as long as time or motivation allow.
10. Close with a period of quiet reflection, either in silence or using reflective music.



2 Large Group: Inspirational Mode

"A Reflection... A Question... An Insight..."

1. The group remains together in one large circle.
2. Picking up the cross, candle or another symbol, offer a reflection, a question, or an insight.
3. After pausing briefly, pass the symbol to a neighbor on the left or the right, inviting this person to share a reflection, a question, or an insight.
4. The one receiving the symbol holds it quietly before responding.
5. If this person elects not to share at this time, s/he simply holds the symbol quietly, before handing it to the next, immediate neighbor in the circle.
6. The symbol passes from hand to hand around the entire circle, inviting all who feel inspired to share a reflection, a question or an insight.
7. After the symbol has come full circle, place it on the small table.
8. Invite anyone who did not share, to pick up the symbol and offer a reflection, question or insight.
9. Re-place the symbol in the center and repeat the process till everyone who has not spoken has had another opportunity to share.
10. Invite everyone to enter into silence.
11. If time permits, open the sharing to the whole circle, passing the symbol to anyone who feels moved to make an additional contribution.
12. Close with a period of quiet reflection, in silence or use reflective music.

3 Two Small Groups

Intimate Circles

1. Divide participants into two (roughly equal) small groups.
2. Balance each small group (women and men; talkers and listeners...).
3. One co-facilitator joins each small group.
4. Where possible, groups meet in separate breakout spaces.
5. Small groups maintain the same circular dynamic.
6. Each group takes a lit candle, placing it at the center of the smaller circle.
7. Open with a period of silence.
8. The co-facilitator chooses the invitational or inspirational mode to initiate sharing.
9. When everyone has been invited to contribute, invite people into a period of silence.
10. Open the dialogue to those who feel moved to make additional contributions.



4 Smaller Circles: Triads (Three people) or Dyads (Pairs)

Inspired Conversations

1. Divide the group into small circles of two or three people.
2. Instruct pairs or triads to spread out in the room, and sit facing one another.
3. Co-facilitators also join pairs or triads
4. Use the chime to open a period of silence.
5. Offer the penetrating question suggested in the materials.
6. Invite people to ponder for a few moments.
7. Instruct the small groups to enter into inspired conversation, alternating listening and sharing.
8. Remind people to leave room for silence between reflections.
9. Close by striking the chime and inviting everyone to return to silence.

5 Large Group: Open Response

"The door is open!"

1. This format is used at the conclusion of sharing/listening time.
2. After a silent pause, extend a broad invitation to anyone who feels moved to share from the heart.
3. Each person is invited to speak once.
4. Use an invitational phrase to encourage people to share from their hearts, for example: *"The floor is open!"*
5. Invite a quiet pause between responses.
6. Thank everyone for sharing and listening, then close with silence.

CAUTION: Structured Sharing and Holy Listening MAY Provoke Resistance!

A highly-stimulated and competitive culture urges us to get our ideas across, make a point, and endeavor to persuade or convince. In the fast-paced marketplace of ideas and opinions, we are familiar with debate: how to dissect, counter and retort. However, as a society, we are unaccustomed to silence, and we are NOT accomplished listeners. Pausing for silence, restraining our urge to respond, reverent listening, and non-discursive sharing, all can feel passive, slow, and even pointless.

At first, this kind of formal, deliberate sharing (*with its rituals, rules, pauses, silence and limits on direct interaction*) may seem restrictive, artificial or rigid.

Heart sharing and holy listening may be particularly frustrating for people who find it easy to verbalize and harder to listen. It can be equally challenging for people who are less inclined to share their thoughts.

With practice, participants will grow more comfortable with silence and fall naturally into the rhythm of pausing, sharing from their depth and listening. The process should flow more smoothly as people learn to slow down, make room for each other, and leave space for quiet attentive presence.

Encourage participants to be patient. Remind everyone that silence is also a form of sharing, our deepest level of communication, our first "sacred" language.



PART FOUR

Guidelines for Dialogue

And it happened that as they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, 'What are you discussing as you walk along?'
Luke 24:15-17

Misunderstandings and communication problems arise in any group process. The suggestions listed below may be helpful. If you are dealing with persistent problems, contact us at: spirituality@justfaith.org or (502)-429-0865.

Listen with the "Ear of the Heart" (Rule of St. Benedict)

When co-facilitators carefully attend to fostering a prayerful environment, the process of dialogue should flow naturally. Co-facilitating the sessions will involve initiating the process, keeping everyone focused, being attentive to time, and making sure that all are included.

Engaging Spirituality sessions lead participants from shared silence, to active listening, to heart sharing, all in the context of ritual and prayer.

This process involves symbols and questions designed to lead us toward communion. Participants practice moving into deeper places, listening and sharing from the heart. The process includes a variety of dynamics for sharing, as well as symbols, questions, prayers, and other tools for dialogue. It takes time and effort to build trust and create an environment conducive to the deeper listening and heart-sharing we call dialogue.

By their presence of heart and mind, co-facilitators do much to set the tone for open and heartfelt sharing. A listening attitude, which generates a deeper and broader understanding, is always more fruitful than debating points. This gentle listening presence, which encourages participants to freely express their own experience, demonstrates reverence for everyone in the circle.

Be Inclusive

Keeping everyone involved and making space for talkers as well as thinkers to listen and share, can be a constant challenge. These suggestions may be helpful:

- End dialogues with: *"Our time is limited, and we need to hear from everyone."*
- Instruct people to take turns when responding to a question, and gently invite the quieter people to share.
- Observe body language and notice when someone is ready to contribute.
- Invite everyone to pause and make space for those who need to think through their thoughts before speaking.

If someone is dominating the dialogue try these responses:

- *"Let's remember our ground rule about making space for everyone to talk."*
- Acknowledge people as they indicate they would like to share, so the speaker knows others are waiting to enter the dialogue.



Promote Dialogue

Engaging Spirituality is a contemplative process in which participants share personal insights and struggles, in order to perceive more clearly the Spirit-presence in the world, and God's call in our lives. No doubt diverse and changing views will be expressed. The goal of this dialogue is a "heart sharing" in which both listeners and speakers are changed.

As co-facilitators, you may wish to establish a set of agreed-upon ground rules to return to when misunderstandings arise. Use ANY of these axioms to define your own ground rules and share them with your group:

Leave room for other voices.

Only God is allowed to judge.

Listening is a form of prayer.

Respect silence-it speaks volumes!

Try to understand rather than be understood.

Dialogue is an end in itself.

Share your truth with kindness.

Speak to build up rather than to tear down.

Stay in the Circle

The overall dynamic for Engaging Spirituality sessions is a circle where all participants are in clear view of one another and at the same eye level.

Body language is an important indicator of the trust and comfort level in a group. Remind everyone to maintain the integrity of the circle, with no one seated outside, behind, or above the rest. Whether we are sharing or listening, everyone should respect the subtleties of this circular, inclusive dynamic.

Manage Creative Tension

Receive opposing viewpoints and the resulting awkwardness they create as "holy ground."

Differences in perspective provide opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of reality. Engaging Spirituality utilizes specific modes for communication, purposefully designed to draw participants into "heart sharing." These prayerful techniques preclude the parsing or diagnosing of another person's sacred story and deliberately curtail the power of domineering voices or forceful opinions. However, if a conversation becomes heated and tension is sustained, intervention is needed. Here are some suggestions:

- Remind everyone that the goal of heart-sharing is neither to create consensus, nor to win people over, but to welcome each other's struggles and insights.
- Acknowledge differences and ask what these perspectives have in common.
- Call people to prayer or silence.
- Interject *appropriate* humor to break the tension.



Embrace Gospel Challenges to Social Realities

A church that does not provoke any crises, a Gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what Gospel is that? The Gospel is courageous; it is the good news of Him who came to take away the world's sins. Neither the church nor the Gospel can be monopolized by any political or social movement. Oscar Romero

On the road to Emmaus the two disciples struggled to make sense of the political realities and consequences of Jesus' execution. In a similar way, participants in this process wrestle with the challenges of following Jesus with integrity in the face of current realities and the needs of those who are poor. There may be times when people express concerns that the process proposes a direct challenge to some cultural, political or ideological perspectives. This is not surprising since Engaging Spirituality deals directly with the practical implications of discipleship and the Gospel mission.

The books, prayers, and questions woven into this process are designed to link the wisdom of our tradition with the personal and social implications of Jesus' teachings on the Reign of God. Some of the voices may be critical of certain approaches, structures or practices. This critique is based on the impact that certain policies and attitudes may have on those who are poor and vulnerable in our world, and not on partisan views.

If participants are uncomfortable with an author's perspective, or the challenges proposed in the process it may be helpful to ask:

- What is being said about the care of the poor and the implications of the Gospel message?
- How do the questions and activities connect with Scripture, and the contemplative traditions and social teachings of our Church?
- What other compassionate responses might be justified, based upon the Gospel message?



PART FIVE

Key Components and Supplies

For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them. Matthew 18: 20

✓ A Meeting Space

You will need a quiet space, suited to the size of your group. Avoid high-traffic areas or noisy environments. Any multipurpose room, small enough to foster a sense of intimacy will work. Sessions can also take place in a spacious living room, provided there are break-out options.

✓ A Circle of Chairs

Sessions begin and end with the same circular dynamic—a circle of chairs around the central table and covenant cloth. The circle should be wide enough to accommodate everyone comfortably (*including one empty chair to represent the Bearings contributor*) and allow participants to see and hear each other easily. At various times, you will be split into small groups, dyads and triads, for reflection and sharing.

✓ A Small Table

The central focusing table holds the covenant cloth, candle, bible, cross and any other symbols the group uses. You may also choose to add a decorative cloth or flowers to enhance the environment.

✓ A Covenant Cloth

Each Engaging Spirituality group creates its own prayer cloth using a square of light-colored cotton fabric (roughly two feet by two feet) and markers. This prayer cloth is incorporated into every session.

The covenant cloth is a unique creation of your group. It is a visible reminder of everyone's commitment to the group process: to listen with attention, share with honesty, receive and respond with compassion.

At the opening retreat participants seal their commitment to the process by signing their names on the cloth. This covenant travels with the group to retreats, serving as a focal point for prayer and a visible reminder of faithful dedication to the process. Spread out in the center of the circle, the cloth creates a focus area for the symbols, opening a sacred space for contemplation, sharing, and dialogue.

The Covenant Commitment

Participants sign the cloth indicating their commitment to practice openhearted listening. As the sessions progress, they hold one another accountable to their covenant commitment to create an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.



✓ The Engaging Spirituality Covenant

Directions for creating the covenant cloth

Using markers write the following covenant in the center of the cloth:

*By Engaging Spirituality we aspire to...
expose our lives to the Spirit of Jesus
participate wholeheartedly
listen with reverence
respond with honesty
forgive with kindness
strive for integrity
hold each other accountable with compassion
and commit to complete this
spirit-led journey together.*

Around the edges of the cloth,
to frame this covenant,
write out the following quotation:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon us
God has anointed us
To bring good news to the poor
Sent us to proclaim release to the captives
Recovery of sight to the blind
To let the oppressed go free
And proclaim the year of God's favor.*



2 ft x 2 ft

Luke 4: 18

Add the date, the Engaging Spirituality logo (see cover page) and the name of your group (parish or community designation).



Candles

A candle burns at every gathering for the duration of the session, to indicate the fiery, living presence of the Holy Spirit among and between us. This candle sits at the center of the covenant cloth to shed light on the group's presence to the process and to one another. At times, the candle will be passed or held by participants. Look for a candle that is portable and stable. You will need an additional candle for breakout sessions. Since some people are sensitive to perfumes, use unscented candles.



A Bible

Keep a (*contemporary translation such as NAB or NRSV*) bible on the focusing table. At various times, you will be directed to proclaim a scripture passage or lead the group in “Lectio Divina” (*Sacred Reading*) prayer.



A Cross or Crucifix

Following Jesus means choosing to walk the way of the cross together. For Christians a cross or crucifix is a graphic illustration of the depth of God’s love; a visible reminder of the reality of suffering and the presence of injustice; a sobering indication of the cost of other-centered living; and our liberating gateway into the Reign of God. Keep a small (hand-held) cross or crucifix on the table at each session. At certain moments you will be directed to use the cross for prayer or dialogue. As with all symbols, opt for natural, hand-crafted or sustainably-produced items over mass-produced, synthetic versions.



A Chime (Singing Bowl or Small Bell)

Bells wake us up, sound the hours, chime in celebration, toll in warning, and call us to prayer. You will need a small hand bell, chime or singing bowl. Punctuating the reflection and shared prayer with the chime will help maintain a reverential tone. At various points, you will strike a chime or ring a small bell to lead the group into silence and call people to attention, inviting everyone to listen.



Music for the Soul

Make a joyful noise... Come into God’s presence with singing. Psalm 100: 1-2

With the power to move, calm, focus, motivate and inspire us, music exemplifies creative spiritual expression. Co-facilitators are responsible for identifying and making available a few options for reflective background music.

In its truest sense, music is a form of prayer. It calms, rouses, inspires, moves and even disturbs us. Music mirror God’s infinite creativity and our diversity. It is also an expression of personal taste. Selecting music for the group is one way that co-facilitators become co-creators of the process. While some music has broad appeal, most of us are drawn to music that matches our individual styles and reflects our social identities. Reflective, background music or soft repetitive chants are ideal for this process, though occasionally a poignant song with relevant theme or lyrics can enhance prayer. Ask participants to suggest, to share and to contribute reflective music. Sometimes you will be encouraged to use reflective music to set the tone for prayer. At other times you will be directed to lead the group into “hard silence,” without the cushion of soothing sounds.



Summary

Come to me all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.

Matthew 11:28-30

A yoke implies a shared burden—that we do not carry out the challenges of Gospel faithfulness alone. There is another load-bearer who walks with us.

As co-facilitators, you play a pivotal role in the Engaging Spirituality process. Your task will be lightened when you enter into the process wholeheartedly, rely on each other, follow the directions and make prayerful preparations.

Prayerful presence is the most valuable form of preparation.

This dimension of co-facilitation cannot be emphasized enough.

God's Spirit works on us and through us, even when we appear ill-prepared or disorganized. Fostering openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit cannot be underestimated, for it is this Spirit (*already present in the lives of your companions*) that is directing the process. It is the Spirit acting on us and through us that transforms.

Being a co-facilitator is demanding work. It is also and ultimately a joyful and life-giving opportunity to shepherd a group through re-awakening. And there are wonders in store for any who dare expose their lives to the Holy Spirit together. Be ready to be changed: to laugh, to weep and to celebrate life with a lighter heart, as you taste God's readjusting love expressed in the stories of your companions and the struggles of God's holy ones. The relationships that develop at the heart of your Engaging Spirituality community, and along its edges, will keep you grounded and hold you accountable. These friendships show us how we are Eucharist when we encounter and become Christ for a blessed and broken, hungry world.

In the end, we at JustFaith Ministries hope you will come to experience how Engaging Spirituality is about falling in love with life by freely entering into life-changing and life-affirming relationships.

Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quite absolute way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who knows you, what breaks your heart and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love, stay in love and it will decide everything. Pedro Arrupe

LET THE SPIRIT LEAD!